Everybody Loves a Mystery

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Everybody Loves a Mystery

by goldenraeofsun

Summary

> “I’m Dick Grayson.” His smile is nearly as bright as his mismatched wardrobe, and Lois finds herself inexorably charmed. She gives his proffered hand a firm shake, noting the pronounced calluses lining the tops of his palms. “That’s quite a grip you’ve got there,” she compliments.
>
> Dick’s smile, impossibly, widens. “It’s nothing compared to Uncle Clark’s,” he demurs.
>
> Behind him, Clark chokes on nothing.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

“Clark Kent, Daily Planet,” Clark says distractedly as he gestures at Lois that he doesn’t need any more coffee.

Lois makes a face at him and pointedly grabs the half-full mug at his desk.

“Clark, how are you doing?”

Clark blinks. He’s not surprised by the lack of introduction – honestly, to be expected from a man who requires no introduction. But he’s very surprised at the smalltalk. “I’m doing well,” Clark says slowly, trying to parse out the hidden meaning behind the call. “And you?”

“I need a favor.”

Clark’s eyebrows shoot up. He can count the number of times Bruce asked him for anything outside of a fight on one hand. Last time, it was a pen; Robin stole his Batpen to do the Sunday crossword while stuck at Mount Justice during their last alien invasion.

That was five months ago.

“Anything,” Clark says, the suspicion vanishing from his voice in an instant as he smiles.

At Clark’s pleased tone, Bruce clams up immediately, grunting a curt, “Hn,” and nothing else.

“Bruce?” Clark swivels in his chair until he faces northeast, towards Gotham. “I can see you’re just sitting in your home office, scowling at a blank computer screen.”

“Remind me to put up lead sheeting tomorrow.”

“You have a child living with you,” Clark chides, now grinning broadly. “You don’t want to risk Dick getting lead poisoning, do you?”

“Dick knows better than to gnaw at the walls, Clark,” Bruce says flatly. “He’s eleven, not four.”

“You told me he took a bite out of a candle the other day.”

Bruce cracks a smile. “To be fair, he thought it was soap.”

Clark lets out a surprised bark of laughter. “How in the world is that *better?”*

“He wasn’t sure what it was made of, so he went for the most direct route.”

“I’m pretty sure the most direct route would be to ask the nearest trusted adult,” Clark says shrewdly. “Not immediate ingestion.”

Bruce sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. “He was trying to prove a point.”

“That he can eat soap?”

“Apparently.”

Clark snorts. “He’s a riot, that one.”

Bruce shakes his head. “I’m glad you think so because I require a babysitter tonight. Alfred is away at a theater festival in Connecticut for the weekend, and I have an unexpected trip out of town.”

Clark glances over at Lois, currently hidden behind the breakroom wall and trying to drown his coffee in sugar. “You sure, Bruce? You know Friday is date night for me and Lois.”

“I’m offering you a mansion with unlimited hot water, no neighbors for miles, and a three course catered dinner.” Bruce says, and before Clark can respond, he adds, “Alfred left an extensive array of pre-made meals because he’s convinced I cannot feed myself for one night.”

“You can feed yourself just fine,” Clark says as Lois starts to saunter back to their shared desk. “I just don’t think your eleven-year-old would be too keen on over-boiled broccoli and under-boiled chicken.”

“Semantics.”

“Let me ask Lois –” He takes the coffee with his free hand. He raises his voice so she can hear, “What do you say to a trip to Gotham tonight?”

“Gotham?” Lois echoes as she makes an expression of sheer disgust. “You know as well as I do that Gotham is a trash city for trash people. Absolutely not.”

Clark presses his lips together to keep the laughter in. “Okie doke. I’ll tell Mr. Wayne we’ll pass on his offer –”

Lois’s eyes nearly bug out of her head. “You’ve got Bruce Wayne’s

assistant on the phone?"

"Here," Clark says as he hands his phone over.

"Wha – " is all she can get out before Clark shoves the phone in her face. "This is Lois Lane," she says professionally as she takes it from him with a disapproving look.

Clark just hears in Bruce's smoothest baritone, *"Why hello, Miss Lane, this is Bruce –"*

Lois drops the phone.

Clark serenely sips at his coffee-flavored sugar and doesn't break once.

Worth it.

* * *

"You were *serious?"* Lois all but screeches after she drags him to the roof and out of earshot of nosy reporters with the byline: Cat Grant. She demands, "You're really friends with Bruce Wayne?"

Clark shrugs like it's no big deal because it's the only reaction that would drive Lois further up the proverbial wall. Sure enough –

"I can't believe you," she fumes. "How? When? Just… how?"

"I'm sorry," he says, not sorry at all, "but Bruce swore me to secrecy."

"You fucked Bruce Wayne?"

This time it is a screech.

Clark winces as heat floods his face. "Lois! No, how could you think that? Oh my gosh, no!"

She places her hands on her hips. "What *else* am I supposed to think?

"Not that!" How is he ever supposed to look Bruce in the face now? This is so much worse than the time he saw too much of Bruce's rear end after a giant robot tore his cape off, taking a good chunk of his suit with it.

Lois's lips purse. "I never pegged you for a homophobe, Clark."

That's the conclusion his brilliant, infuriating girlfriend comes up with? He shakes his head vehemently. "I'm not a homophobe!"

"Hm," she hums, "that's exactly what a homophobe would say."

She *can't* think he's homophobic. Hasn't he proven time and time again that he doesn't discriminate, both as Superman and Clark Kent? He frowns. "I have a few very good friends –"

Lois's mouth twitches.

Darn her. He straightens, his expression hardening. "That's not a nice thing to accuse someone of," he says in his most Superman-like voice.

Lois just cackles.

Still, he has to dispel all doubt. He adds, "Seriously, you know I don't have any issues with –"

"Calm down, Smallville," Lois says, rolling her eyes. "No, I don't really think you're homophobic, Jesus."

Some of the tension eases from his shoulders. "Good."

Lois's eyes crinkle with mirth. "Anyone ever tell you that you're too wound up sometimes?"

"Compared to Batman," he points out, "most people think I'm actually pretty easygoing."

Lois visibly brightens, and oh, *shoot*, he's really stepped in it now. "Hey, if we're going to Gotham, we could –"

Clark blurts too loudly, "No way!" He takes a deep breath, trying to calm his panic. "I am not arranging a meeting with Batman, staking out Batman's patrol route, or anything else you can think of to get Batman in your crosshairs."

"But –"

He glowers down at her. "The NDA, Lois."

"You're *Superman*," she wheedles. "The NDA is *a piece of paper."*

"I'm also a member of the media," he says seriously, "who has less than eight grand in my bank account and spends way too much on rent as it is."

“C’mon,” she tries again, “what harm could a little looking around –”

“Forget it, Lois,” he tells her. “It’s Gotham.”

“So what? It’s just –” She makes a face as the reference hits home. “Seriously? Did you just quote Chinatown at me? You’re such a dork.” She pokes him hard in the chest. “And I will not be distracted! *Batman*, Clark. You’ve gotta give me something about *Batman*.”

He shakes his head. “I have to do no such thing.”

She throws up her hands. “For such a paragon of truth and justice, you are truly the fucking worst.”

Clark sighs. “If it means anything, I did ask him if I could tell you his identity.”

Lois’s head jerks up to stare at him so suddenly, he does a quick scan to see if she actually gave herself whiplash. In a hushed voice, she asks, “You… asked him? For me?”

Last weekend, actually. Clark asked Bruce when he went ring shopping. It meant a lot to him that Bruce came along, even if Bruce kept suggesting rings that were two or three times what Clark had saved up for. But that’s what he gets when he takes a billionaire to a mid-range jewelry store in downtown Metropolis.

Bruce didn’t immediately give him the all-clear to tell Lois, but he didn’t say no either, so Clark took that as a good sign. If Bruce disagreed or didn’t trust her, he would not have hesitated to say so. It’s been less than a week, so Bruce probably is still calculating whether telling Lois will start the nuclear apocalypse, World War III, or, hopefully, none of the above.

Anyway, Clark has been distracted. On Monday, after their trip to the jewelers, Clark accidentally overheard a major City Hall tip. He wrote up the story in record time (without her) because he had *you know, Lois, that* thing *in Italy where I couldn’t text because I was busy stopping a volcanic eruption.* Lois, naturally, couldn’t take that lying down, so she’s been waging an extremely petty prank war in the office in retaliation.

On Monday afternoon, she stole his stapler and hid it in the ladies room. On Tuesday, Clark took the batteries out of her computer mouse and melted them to slag. On Wednesday, Lois stuck post-its full of increasingly hairy dicks to his cubicle walls. This morning, he lowered

her office chair to its shortest setting and jammed it in place.

Clark puts on a long-suffering voice. “I asked Batman against my better judgment because I’m never going to get a moment’s peace when you inevitably team up against me.”

Lois throws him a baffled look. “No way am I teaming up with a *man from Gotham* against you. Trash city for trash people, remember?”

“Gee, thanks, Lois,” he says as he bends down to peck her on the cheek. “I mean, you’re going to eat your words, but I appreciate the sentiment.”

“You’re really that convinced we’ll get along?” she asks dubiously.

“You’re my best friends,” he says simply. “And you’re both the most stubborn people I know. You’ll find a way to make it work.”

“Hm.”

* * *

Clark lets them into Wayne Manor with a spare key because *of course* Lois’s boyfriend just casually has a spare key to the most expensive residential building within Gotham city limits.

“Holy shit,” Lois gasps as they walk through the entryway and into the foyer – hardwood floors, intricate crown molding, a glittering crystal chandelier, priceless oil paintings covering the walls, a magnificent grand staircase leading to the second floor. It all effuses the old money kind of class no paper check can buy.

“Uncle Clark!” comes from above their heads.

That’s the only warning Lois has before a multicolored blur launches from the chandelier.

“Oh shit,” she gasps as Clark easily positions himself below to catch the living projectile.

How the hell had she missed a whole-ass child? Especially one dressed like that, in sunny yellow pants, a bright crimson shirt, and sky blue… flip flops? Clearly Bruce Wayne’s famous fashion sense does not carry down adoptive lines.

“Oh my gosh, Dick,” Clark is already chastising, his forehead pinching. “I know Bruce told you to stop doing that. And Alfred too.”

“But this one is *reinforced,”* Dick complains. “It’s not gonna crash like the others.”

Lois casts a nervous glance upwards. The chandelier swings ominously.

Clark, unfazed by the small flying child, argues, “It’s not about the chandelier. It’s a matter of safety. These floors are hard, and you can only slow your fall so much –”

“But you and Bruce always catch me! And your face is very funny when I take you by surprise.”

Clark sighs as he sets Dick down on his feet. “You are smart enough to know we won’t always catch you if you keep trying to take us by surprise.”

“But you have –” he breaks off at the sight of Lois. “Hello!”

“Hi, kid,” Lois says awkwardly. She’s not really a *child* person per se. She occasionally enjoys spending time with her niece and nephew, but only after they stopped being babies and could string simple sentences together. When they were really little, Lois pretended not to be terrifically bored around them for Lucy’s sake, but she pawned them off on Clark as often as she could.

Unperturbed at all by her hesitation, Dick confidently sticks out his hand for her to shake. “I’m Dick.” His smile is nearly as bright as his wardrobe, and despite his unconventional entrance, Lois finds herself inexorably charmed. She gives him a firm shake, noting the pronounced calluses lining the tops of his palms. “That’s quite a grip you’ve got there,” she compliments.

Dick’s smile, impossibly, widens. “It’s nothing compared to Uncle Clark’s,” he demurs.

Behind him, Clark chokes on nothing.

“Did he teach you how to shake like that?” Lois asks, amused.

“Something like that,” Dick says, and, dear god, those dimples are too much.

“Dick, this is my girlfriend, Lois,” Clark says. “She’s a reporter at The Daily Planet, like I am.”

Dick glances over his shoulder, frowning. “Of course I know who *Lois Lane* is,” he says in a very put-upon voice.

Clark holds up both his hands, his mouth twitching like he’s holding back a smile. “Just checking.”

“You do?” Lois asks Dick, impressed and confused. Why the hell would a preteen from Gotham know her or her work?

“Of course I do,” Dick scoffs like she *and* Clark are the stupid ones. “You write about Superman.”

Lois blinks. “You like Superman?”

“He’s my favorite superhero,” Dick says proudly as behind him, Clark just drags a hand down his face, muttering vague grumpy noises.

Lois beams down at Dick. “He’s mine too. But you live in Gotham,” she says. “Don’t you like Batman?”

Dick rolls his eyes. “He’s just a dude. Superman, though – *Superman* is a super strong alien who flies around! Did you see him take out that wizard guy last week? He was all *boom,*” he mimes a mighty punch, *“pow, hi-ya!”* and finishes with the same one-two combo that Superman used to end the fight, albeit pint-sized.

“Are you hungry? I’m hungry,” Clark announces loudly, his face as red as Dick’s shirt. “What did Alfred leave for dinner, anyway?”

* * *

Butternut squash soup finished with a swirl of creme fraiche for appetizers.

Chicken parmesan with homemade marinara sauce for mains.

Feather-light chocolate mousse and fresh strawberries and whipped cream for dessert.

“Does this Alfred come with his own Michelin star?” Lois groans as she slumps back in her chair. Across the table, she watches Clark and Dick split the last three quarters of her dessert.

Clark, *somehow*, ends up with more chocolate on his face than the literal child. She tries to muster more annoyance than affection at the sight – and fails utterly. God, he’s such a freak, and she’s so far gone on him.

“What’s a Michelin star?” Dick asks as he scrapes the spoon along the bottom of the fancy little glass bowl.

“An award for the best restaurants,” Clark supplies as he wipes his face with his cloth napkin. “An establishment can get one, two, or three stars. Three is incredibly rare. There are only about 150 across the world.”

Dick says firmly, “Then Alfred deserves at least two stars.”

“He sure does, kid,” Lois agrees as Clark gets to his feet to deal with the dishes. She pushes her chair back to help, but Dick shakes his head. “Stay,” he says.

Curious, she stays as Clark shrugs and disappears into the kitchen. She waits for Dick to follow up, but he does absolutely nothing but study her with surprisingly sharp blue eyes. After a few loaded seconds, she asks lightly, “Something you wanna talk about?”

“I figured you’d want to talk, actually,” Dick says, resting both his elbows on the table as he leans forward. “This place holds a lot of secrets.”

Lois leans forward too, mimicking his posture. “Is that right?” she asks seriously.

Dick nods.

“This does seem like the kind of house with a secret passageway or two,” she says conversationally.

“Just one.” Dick rolls his eyes and leans in closer. “But that’s not important. Bruce told me he wants to let you in on his biggest secret. Way bigger than a passageway.”

Lois raises her eyebrows. “Is that so?”

“Mm hm,” Dick hums, looking pleased. “But he wants you to pass a test first.” He scowls adorably. “Bruce sure likes tests.”

Lois blinks. She’s pretty sure the tabloids once quoted Bruce Wayne bragging that he got Ps in all his classes in college. “He does?”

Dick nods. “You should’ve seen the ones he put Clark through. Bruce trusts nobody at first. It’s actually pretty annoying.”

“I bet,” Lois says neutrally as she adds each detail to her mental image

of Bruce Wayne. It figures even an airhead like Wayne must have a modicum of stranger danger if he has that many zeros in his bank account. “Did you know I didn’t trust Clark at first either?”

Dick’s brow furrows. “Why not? He’s the best.”

“Right?” Lois sighs loudly. “So I thought he must be putting on an act. Nobody can be *that* nice all the time.”

“Except Uncle Clark,” Dick says defensively.

“Except Clark,” Lois agrees with a smile.

“After dinner, Bruce usually likes to play a game or two,” Dick says completely apropos of nothing. Lois rolls with it because maybe eleven-year-olds are just like that. It’s not like she has much experience to go on. “Uncle Clark is… very bad at video games.”

“Shocker,” Lois deadpans.

Dick shrugs. “I don’t understand why because his reflexes are better than *Bruce’s*, but he still loses like every time.” He shakes his head. “Anyway, I can keep Uncle Clark busy and give you time to look around.”

Lois’s gaze sharpens. What a strange thing to offer her. She tries to wrestle back down her suspicion, and doesn’t quite make it. “Why are you doing this for me?”

“You make Uncle Clark happy,” Dick says simply before his mouth curves into a sly smile. “And I bet Bruce that I could lead you to the answer without saying the code word.”

“Jesus, is Bruce Wayne a spy?” Lois says with a little laugh. “Code words? Secret passageways? Enough secrets to fill a mansion?”

“There’s just one secret passageway,” Dick reminds her with a sniff.

* * *

Sure enough, after five minutes of video games, Dick asks her if she can get him a glass of water. Clark, predictably, jumps to get it first. After ten seconds, Dick gives her a horribly obvious wink and taps the side of his nose.

Lois doesn’t need telling twice.

She finds a few embarrassing baby photos of Bruce Wayne, all his highschool yearbooks, and a few very intriguing knickknacks. Why does he keep an Atlantean dagger in the drawing room? And why does he have a set of coins from Bialya, a country that has been led by a string of people on the US's terrorist watch list, in the conservatory? And don't get her started on the *five* shotguns she found hidden in the library, living room, and parlor.

After twenty minutes, Clark literally pulls her out from under a billiards table. "What the heck are you doing?" he demands in a frantic whisper as he lets go of her ankles.

"Snooping," she says honestly before she climbs to her feet. He offers a hand to help her up because, as annoyed as he ever gets at her, Martha Kent raised her son right.

"We're guests here," he says, sounding way too aggrieved for the circumstances. "You can't just go invading Bruce's privacy like this!"

Lois raises her eyebrows. "Have you met me?"

Clark crosses his arms over his chest and tries his best to look imposing. Joke's on him, though, since he lost the intimidation factor around the 86th time he pretended to get stuck in the revolving door at The Planet.

She shrugs. "Dick told me to do it."

He glares down at her. "And now you're blaming a *ten-year-old?* Really?"

"He's eleven."

Clark mutters something wholly unflattering about her (award-winning) investigative instinct under his breath and not-so-gently steers her out of the room. "Have you ever heard that curiosity killed the cat?"

"C'mon, Kent," she complains, "You're a professional writer. Isn't it time you ditch the cliches?"

"You're impossible," he says flatly as they walk down the hall, weirdly enough, in the opposite direction of the game room.

"Thank you," she says with a smile. She looks around. "Where are we going?"

“Dick’s disappeared,” he says shortly.

She snaps her head around to stare at him. “From you?”

“He’s… slippery,” Clark says, sounding weirdly squirrelly.

“You have *x-ray vision,”* she says slowly.

“I’m worried he’s gone outside,” Clark says as he eyes the window at the end of the hallway, showing the pitch-black back yard. “The grounds are… extensive.”

“I’ll check the rest of the first floor.” Lois reaches over to squeeze his arm. “We’ll find him. It’s not like he’s snuck all the way down to Gotham.”

Clark sucks in a breath, muttering, “He’d better not,” nonsensically before he strides to the window, unlatches it, and leaps into the night.

Shaking her head, Lois takes the steps at a fast clip. In the library, she peers behind every bookshelf. In the ballroom, she checks behind the heavy damask curtains and ornate wet bar.

In Wayne’s study, she throws herself in the extremely comfortable office chair – hello, lumbar support – behind his massive desk. She swivels around, taking in the shiny photos of Dick, the older ones of his parents, and the framed article from the Gotham Gazette announcing Bruce Wayne’s wardship of Richard Grayson.

One wall is taken up by two large bookshelves full of cloth-bound classics. Probably all for show, if she knows anything about Wayne’s reading habits. In between the shelves sits a six-foot tall grandfather clock showing the wrong time.

Puzzled, Lois gets up. Dick did mention a secret passageway; maybe he’s hiding in one. In all the old movies and cartoons, the catch is behind a book. She starts pulling ones out at random. *Metaphysics* by Aristotle. *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky. *Psychological Types* by Karl Jung. *1984* by George Orwell. *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu.

But after her tenth failed attempt, she moves on to the grandfather clock. She’s running a finger down the frozen hour and minute hands when she hears it – the faint whistle of moving air.

Eyes narrowing, she leans in closer, and the whistling gets louder.

Jackpot. She pushes at the side of the clock, putting her back into it a little, and it silently slides aside on well-oiled hinges.

God, this shit is straight out of a Nancy Drew novel.

Absent billionaire, check.

Enormous gothic mansion, check.

Secret passageway in the study, check.

Flush with success, she pulls out her phone to illuminate a set of dark stairs leading who knows where. Carefully, she descends, ears piqued for any noise that could tell her what's up ahead. The air grows colder the deeper she goes, and she barely has the thought that, hey, she should probably call her boyfriend, *Superman,* for backup when the stairs end, and Lois finds herself in an enormous, brightly lit cavern beneath Wayne Manor.

Holy shit.

And she thought the upstairs foyer was impressive. But this cave bursting with cutting edge equipment nearly takes her breath away.

"Is that a dinosaur?" she gapes.

"Yeah," Dick chirps from right behind her. "Isn't it cool?"

What the fuck? She jumps about a foot in the air, swearing loudly. Red-faced with embarrassment, she whirls around to find Dick perched on the stair railing. She'd completely missed him on her way down. He leaps to the floor and lands silently in front of her.

How the hell does he do that in *flip flops?*

"So you found me," Dick says proudly. "I knew you would."

"You wanted to lead me… here?" Lois says as she slowly spins in place, taking in the massive computer to her left and an open area covered in training mats to her right. Above them, on niches carved into the cave walls, sit an odd series of objects – a bedazzled cane in the shape of a question mark, a massive joker face card, a human-sized penny.

She walks further into the cave, and that's when she sees the glass cases –

Batman suits. A whole row of them, ending with one of Robin's uniforms.

She turns around to see Dick staring at her, his head tilted at a bird-like angle, or maybe that's just her brain going haywire with all this new information.

"This is Bruce Wayne's big secret?" she demands loudly, sounding more than slightly deranged. Her voice eerily echoes off the cave walls.

"It is pretty big," Dick agrees. "And when you meet Bruce, make sure to let him know that I never said the B-word."

"Are you kidding me?" She drags a hand down her face. "Your codeword is *Batman?"*

Dick shrugs. "Sometimes Bruce is so smart, he circles back around to stupid."

"Oh my god," she says for lack of anything better to say. It feels like her brain is melting out of her ears. All of this certainly explains way too much – Clark's friendship with Bruce, Clark's ironclad NDA, hell, even Dick's eye-searing outfit. An homage to his dinner guests.

Dick spins in place. "It's not as awesome as The Fortress of Solitude, but it is pretty awesome," he says, not put off at all by Lois's mental crisis, "Much easier to get to, too."

She lays a hand on Dick's shoulder, mostly to keep him in place, partially to ground herself. "You've been to The Fortress?"

"Of course," Dick says, sounding slightly offended.

"Jesus Christ," Lois mutters.

"Dick Grayson!"

Dick stiffens, and Lois can't help the surge of schadenfreude. For once, it's nice to hear Clark bust out his Superman-voice for someone that isn't her.

"What the heck were you thinking, young man?" Clark demands as he flies down in front of them.

But Dick's answer is drowned out by the roar of an engine and squeal of military grade tires that echo around the cave.

“Oh good,” Dick says cheerfully. “Bruce is back.”

“I am going to kill him,” Clark swears.

Batman slides out of his impossibly souped up, ridiculously bat-themed car. “Good evening,” he says as he approaches the trio standing in the middle of the cave. Well, two are standing. One is floating rather menacingly.

“Don’t ‘good evening’ me, Batman,” Clark snarls.

Dick takes a large step away from Clark, his expression alarmed.

Unperturbed, Batman pulls back the cowl. “Hello,” he says to Lois. “I’m Bruce.”

Lois snorts. “Hell of an entrance, there.”

“I have been known to do that.” He tilts his head behind him. “I hope dinner was satisfactory.”

“Bruce,” Clark rumbles threateningly.

Lois audibly chokes back her laughter. God, she’s only seen Clark this hopping mad a handful of times over the years. She deliberately keeps her voice light as she tells Batman, “Dinner was great.”

“Lois,” Clark hisses, but she can hear the faintest note of helplessness in his voice.

Suck it, Smallville. Doesn’t feel great to be the last one in on the plan, does it Mr. Story-Stealer-Extraordinaire?

“Dick,” Bruce turns to his ward, “well done.”

Dick beams up at his mentor. “I expect payment next week.”

“Of course.”

“Dick too?” Clark moans. “You *bribed him to go along with this?”*

“Nonsense,” Bruce says, finally turning to Clark. “He was an integral part.”

Lois snorts loudly. “This kid is something else.”

Grinning, Dick flips into a handstand, and, god, where did Bruce find

him?

“Okay,” Clark says, his voice strained with the effort not to blow off the handle, “can you *please* tell me why you did all this?”

“You wanted to tell her,” Bruce says simply. “I thought, as an investigative reporter, she would appreciate, ah, a little investigating.”

Lois’s mouth purses. On one hand, he is absolutely right. On the other, she has the distinct feeling that Bruce has played her – her and Clark, both.

“And now,” Bruce continues to Clark, “you can’t win your little prank war by surprising her with Batman’s identity.”

Lois’s eyes widen as she rounds on Clark, angry and more than a little embarrassed. “You told him about the prank war?”

“I did not,” Clark says, offended at the very thought – which, good. What happens in the bullpen, stays in the bullpen.

She whirls on Bruce. “How the hell do you know about the prank war?” she demands.

“I’m Batman,” he says and *winks*.

“And now you’re flirting with her,” Clark mutters as he throws up his hands. “I don’t know what I expected.”

Lois studies Bruce, taking in the heavy body armor up close. The cape seems to be made of some high-tech, highly durable weave. His boots aren’t steel-toed, but they look heavy and are painted jet-black. She draws herself up to her full height. “So does this mean ‘The Batman’ finally consents to an interview?”

“That, I did expect,” Clark says, his affection clear despite his exasperation.

Bruce’s showman smile turns into something more genuine. “All this is strictly off the record.”

Lois grimaces. “Figures,” she grumbles. “Scoop of the freakin’ century,” she says, conscious of the young ears present, “and my hands are completely tied.”

“But if you want to ask about Wayne Enterprises most recent foray into AI-powered cancer research,” Bruce says airily as he walks off,

“You can meet me in my study in fifteen minutes.”

Lois turns to Clark. “Is he always like this?” she asks incredulously.

Clark just unleashes the loudest sigh she has ever heard as Dick pipes up, “Pretty much. Hey, do you know how to do a cartwheel?”

* * *

The next morning, Clark rises with the sun and does a quick fly around Wayne Manor’s extensive grounds to stretch his legs, so to speak, before landing on the back patio in front of Bruce.

“I’m still mad at you,” Clark says as Bruce greets him with a solemn toast of his glass of lemonade. The dark circles beneath his eyes tell Clark that he didn’t go to sleep at all after Lois grilled him for forty minutes about predictive AI models and cancer sample sets.

“You will forgive me,” Bruce says in his maddeningly self-assured tone. He doesn’t get up from his wicker lawn chair.

“Is that why you did it?” Clark asks, trying for a bitter tone and getting about halfway there. Sue him, it’s very hard to feel bitter first thing in the morning after sleeping on gazillion-thread count Egyptian cotton sheets.

“Partially,” Bruce says with a dip of his head. “But Lois Lane has always struck me as someone who places a lot of stock in first impressions.”

“So you decided being an ass was the best impression you could make?” Clark asks, eyebrows raising as he takes the other seat next to Bruce.

“I decided giving her a leg up against you would just about edge me into her good graces, yes.”

“I will never understand you, Bruce,” Clark declares, not altogether truthfully.

“You understand me just fine,” Bruce says mildly. “You just don’t agree, is the thing.”

Clark slumps back in his chair. “I suppose that’s a fairly accurate picture of what’s going on here.”

Bruce gets up. “Enjoy the sun while you can,” he says. “Rain's

supposed to come in an hour." He disappears into the house. Inside, Clark hears him head into the kitchen and rustle around in the pantry.

Clark tilts his head to catch more sunlight and dozes slightly until the sound of an argument reaches his ears and the first drops of drizzle hit his cheek.

He's in the kitchen in a flash, watching as Lois and Bruce snipe at each other about how to properly crack an egg. He doesn't quite muffle his laughter fast enough.

They both whirl around to face him, Lois red-faced, Bruce as impassive as ever except for the slight tightening in the corners of his mouth.

"Whose bright idea was it to make breakfast?" Clark asks, feeling like a kindergarten teacher walking into a classroom covered in fingerpaint.

Both Bruce and Lois steadily avoid each other's gaze.

"Honestly," Clark says as he gently elbows them both aside. "You both should know better."

They both erupt into excuses:

"He was the one who –"

"I was simply doing it the way –"

Clark stares them both down until both their protests dwindle away to embarrassed silence. "You," he says to Bruce, "are expressly forbidden from making anything except toast and cereal. Alfred told me so." He turns to Lois as she throws Bruce a triumphant look, "And you tried to microwave a fork *twice* in the past month." She frowns. He adopts his most Superman-sounding voice. "Lois, set the table. Bruce, wake up Dick for breakfast."

Reluctantly humbled, Lois grabs the small stack of plates Clark cleaned last night as Bruce just grumbles to himself.

As Bruce holds the door open for her, Lois mutters, "Does he use the I'm-not-mad-I'm-just-disappointed schtick on you too?"

Bruce dips his head in assent. "At our last post-mission debrief, Flash

almost cried."

"No way," Lois gasps, delighted.

Bruce lowers his voice for effect, "Diana told me privately she prefers when he yells."

"Superman yells?" Lois's eyebrows raise. "Since when?"

One corner of Bruce's mouth ticks up in one of his genuine half-smiles. "Since Green Lantern said the Chiefs were going to embarrass themselves in the Super Bowl and should just concede to the Raiders now."

Lois winces in sympathy.

Bruce pulls out his phone and tentatively holds it out to Lois. "I have cowl footage of every meeting I attend. Would you like to see?"

"Would I," Lois breathes.

Clark dumps Bruce and Lois's mixture of eggshells and yolk (the whites somehow ended up all over the counter) into the sink and tunes out the rest of their conversation. He'll save the I-told-you-so's until Monday when he will totally win that prank war. After all, he has a diamond-shaped ace in his pocket.

End Notes

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